

Chapel Talk
Kassy Fritz
September 17, 2008

It was then that the fox appeared.

"Good morning," said the fox.

"Good morning," the little prince responded politely, although when he turned around he saw nothing.

"I am right here," the voice said, "under the apple tree."

"Who are you?" asked the little prince, and added, "You are very pretty to look at."

"I am a fox," said the fox.

"Come and play with me," proposed the little prince. "I am so unhappy."

"I cannot play with you," the fox said. "I am not tamed."

"Ah! Please excuse me," said the little prince.

But, after some thought, he added:

"What does that mean-- 'tame'?"

"You do not live here," said the fox. "What is it that you are looking for?"

"I am looking for friends." said the little prince. "What does that mean-- 'tame'?"

"It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. It means to establish ties."

"To establish ties'?"

"Just that," said the fox. "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world..."

"Ah." said the little prince, "I am beginning to understand,"

The first time I read St. Exupery's *The Little Prince*, I was in eighth grade French. Since that introduction, over thirty years ago, I have reread this special story of a little boy in search of friendship countless times. It is one of those wonderful tales that means something slightly different to me every time I read it. In my experience as a teacher, *The Little Prince* has enriched the classroom, as I have watched students delight in the experience of reading their first piece of literature in French, amazed and proud of their linguistic ability, and fully engaged in the lessons St. Exupery shares through his writing. I never tire of this marvelous tale. In many ways, it is quite simple: a little prince from a tiny planet no larger than a house travels the universe in search of companionship. Yet, as is so often true, it is through the eyes, heart and mind of the reader that this simple tale reveals so many truths about ourselves and about the world in which we live.

So a year ago, when I met with Madame Johnson to discuss teaching French III at St. Andrew's, I was thrilled that *The Little Prince* would be part of the curriculum. It had been a few years since I had taught French, so I was comforted at the notion of revisiting this book and felt assured that I was prepared to engage students in the language and themes of the novel without hesitation. But, as has so often been the case with *The Little Prince*, I was again surprised by how different the experience of teaching and reading this book was for me this time around. You see, for the first time I was reading and teaching the story as a parent. And so it was, through my new filter as a mother, that this simple tale, once again, revealed a new lesson.

A year ago August, Mr. Fritz, John, Caroline and I arrived on the St. Andrew's campus for the first time. We had packed up our home and belongings in Connecticut and moved south, on what we were calling "a great family adventure." For those of you who have never been on campus in August, it is a little bit like a Fenway Park in March, with echoes of the season past and the promise of the season yet to come....but really empty! Nonetheless, we began to unpack our lives at 350 Noxontown Road. Boxes were opened, rooms were settled and we began to find our way around campus. John and Caroline, undeterred by the 100-degree weather, explored the School with curiosity and excitement. Many a bike ride and scooter ride were taken as the weeks of August slowly moved by. So

far, so good, Mr. Fritz and I thought as we neared the opening of school. Friends and family had assured us not to worry about John and Caroline; kids are resilient and will adapt to change quickly. And, for a few weeks there, Mr. Fritz and I rode that optimistic wave. As you all well know from the past couple of weeks, the opening of school comes with a flurry and the campus quickly takes on an energetic life filled with new faces and personalities. The fullness of those opening days both fueled and exhausted our family.

But our momentum came to a screeching halt, as I put John to bed after his first day of school at St. Anne's. "Mom," he said, chin quivering and eyes filling with tears, "When can we go home?" A deep breath, a rapid heartbeat and a lump in my throat, I answered, "This is home, John. This is our new home." "No it's not, mom. Everything is too different to be home. This isn't my home." As I hugged John tight enough so he couldn't see my own tears, I searched for an answer that would make sense to his six-year-old mind and heart. As an adult, I had faith and perspective that time would make it all better, that John would make friends, settle into a routine that was comfortable and come to feel familiar and happy here. But how do you explain that to a little boy for whom everything and everyone is suddenly unfamiliar? How could I make the transition easier for him, quicker for him? The answer was, I couldn't, because it would take time....

How does it happen that a house becomes a home? That a campus becomes a community? That an acquaintance becomes a friend? That a teacher becomes a mentor? That a senior becomes a role model? That a stranger becomes familiar? . . .

Sitting on the window sill of my classroom in late April, observing my French III class discuss the chapter I shared at the start of my talk—the tale of the fox and the little prince about how we create ties that make us unique to one another - I came to appreciate what new perspective I could glean from St. Exupery's wisdom this time around. I listened as my mixed class of seniors, juniors and sophomores unpacked the moral of the little prince's story and related it to their lives at St. Andrew's. To "establish ties," they concluded, was to spend time together. "Ties" are the connections we make day-by-day, week-by-week, semester-by-semester and year-by-year. Connection happens, they

observed, in the classroom, through listening, risking, sharing and working together. It happens at lunch, when we gather around a table to talk and listen in the midst of a busy day. It happens in the art room, when we share countless hours working on a project side-by-side with a fellow artist. It happens in the dorm, when we stay up late talking with a roommate. It happens in School Meeting, when we laugh, cry or celebrate as a community. It happens on the athletic field, when a group of individual players work tirelessly to become a team. It happens when we pass Mr. Ron's school van, and he greets us with his awesome smile and hello. It happens when we pass through the lunch line and stop to say 'thank you'. It happens here, when we gather to share our individual and collective prayers.

And, from my window perch, the mother in me wanted to add, it happens when you agree to read an extra bedtime story to a faculty child, even if it means you will stay up a little late that night to finish your homework. It happens when you play "mother may I" in the corner of the basketball gym with the coach's daughter. It happens when you stay after a long, hard football practice to play catch with the coach's son. It happens when you make Sunday school an event worth scootering your fastest to get to each week. It happens when you stop your bike ride home from work to ask a bright-eyed boy what he thought of the Red Sox game the night before. It happens when you spend Wednesday afternoons creating fairy houses out of tree trunks. It happens when you play wiffle ball in a backyard while you really should be studying for exams. It happens each and every time you shout a 'hello' or give a hug to a wide-eyed child.

Students, faculty, staff, and children, we are all stewards and beneficiaries of the human connections that make St. Andrew's our home. What a terrific opportunity and responsibility it is to be part of this School. St. Andrew's is a beautiful campus with incredible resources. But none of that really means anything without you. It is, indeed, the time we spend together - through the ups and downs, through the work and play - that brings this community to life and makes us unique and special to one another. With nearly 100 new members of this community, there is undoubtedly a range of transitions taking place. And who knows...your new roommate, teammate, or teacher who seems totally at

ease with life in Middletown may benefit from your intentional or unintentional act of kindness.

In June, the school year behind us and the campus once again empty, John and I headed off for a bike ride out to the farm. Beaming with the promise of summer before him, John had completed a great year in first grade and was happily ensconced in our life at St. Andrew's. As we rode side by side, I asked him, "What do you like best about our new home?" half expecting he might answer the ice cream and waffles at Sunday brunch or having a pool in our backyard. Without hesitation, John answered. "The people mom, definitely the people."

Just like St. Exupery's little prince, John was beginning to understand.

Thank you.